



# GAY BUDDHIST Fellowship

SUMMER 2018 NEWSLETTER

## Acting on the Four Noble Truths

BY LAURA BURGES

**Ryuko Laura Burges, a lay entrusted Buddhist teacher in the Soto Zen tradition, lectures and leads retreats at different practice centers in Northern California. A teacher of children for over 30 years, she trains other teachers to bring mindfulness practice into the elementary classroom. Laura co-founded the Sangha in Recovery program at Zen Center and has a particular interest in the intersection of Buddhism and Recovery. She is the abiding teacher at the Lenox House meditation group in Oakland.**

**G**ood morning, everyone. I came to the San Francisco Zen Center in 1975, and that's been the core of my Buddhist teaching. My teacher is Abbess Eijun Linda Ruth Cutts, the Abbess of Zen Center. Of course, my other teachers are my twenty one third graders, and everything I know about patience I learned from them. They ask me very difficult questions. One of my little boys raised his hand and said, "Laura, is Reno really the biggest little city in the world?" He'd been to Reno and seen a sign to that effect. So, they're my teachers and I can't seem to get through a Buddhist talk without mentioning them.

I've been thinking lately how pernicious any kind of fundamentalism is in our world. I don't know why, but last night I was just thinking about all the mischief and the violence and the hatred that's been done in our world in the name of religion. Once I got going on that, it was a little hard to go to sleep. I will say that Buddhism is maybe one of the more benign religions. We don't proselytize or condemn others for their beliefs. But there can be a kind of fundamentalism in Buddhism, as well.

I'd like to share with you a very refreshing teacher to me, Stephen Batchelor, of whom you may have heard. He's a British scholar, a Buddhist scholar and teacher and a long-time practitioner as well. His book, *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, I found very refreshing when I read it, and I'd like to share a little bit about it with you. He talks a lot in this book about the Four Noble Truths. I'll be talking about them both in the way they're often presented and then, as well, in the way Batchelor presents them. His is a kind of antidote to the typical way we tend to think of the Four Noble Truths.

We know the story of Buddha and how he sat underneath the bodhi tree. He tried many, many paths before he took his seat under the bodhi tree, the tree of awakening. Interestingly, a lot of his life occurred under trees. He was born under a tree. He was enlightened under a tree. He taught under a tree, and he died under a tree. Trees are very special totems for me. I think because they're our teachers, too. A tree takes root in a certain place. It takes what it needs from the environment, and it gives us back shade and fruit and beauty without asking anything in return. That's a wonderful teaching. Maybe there's a particular tree that touches your heart.

So, Buddha was very aligned with trees. And then, when he sat down under the bodhi tree, he said, "I will not move from this place until I obtain enlightenment." Batchelor prefers the term "awakening." The Buddha penetrated the truth of our suffering, and he

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# A tree takes root in a certain place. It takes what it needs from the environment, and it gives us back shade and fruit and beauty without asking anything in return. That's a wonderful teaching.

was visited by many temptations and assaults on his consciousness, but he stood fast. I think it's very interesting that he touched the ground to affirm his right to awaken. He touched the ground and he put his other hand up in the air to take his place in the world of things.

We have that right, too. I think the reason Buddha's story is so compelling is because it's our story as well. You surely have had a time in your life where you finally had to affirm your place in the universe, your right to awakening. So, Buddha's teaching begins with the Four Noble Truths, this insight that he had upon awakening under the bodhi tree. I'm sure other teachers here have spoken about the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path—these foundational teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddha stated these truths very succinctly, but over the millennia, his awakening has often been characterized as this mind-blowing, mystical experience—a moment of transcendent realization, you might say a burning bush, rather than the interwoven complex of truths that are suggested by the Buddha's experience. This is the thesis of Batchelor's book. This is, to me, a wonderful antidote to fundamentalism, this notion that "I know the truth, and your truth isn't as good as my truth."

This is from the *Kalama Sutta*. The Buddha said, "Do not be satisfied with hearsay or with tradition or with legendary lore or with what has come down in the scriptures or with conjecture or with logical inference or with weighing evidence or with a liking for a view after pondering over it or with someone else's ability or with the thought, 'the monk is our teacher.' When you know in yourselves that these things are wholesome, blameless, commended by the wise, and being adopted and put into effect, they lead to welfare and happiness, then you should practice and abide in them."

So the Buddha famously said, "I teach about suffering and an end to suffering." And at the end of his life, he said, "Be a lamp unto yourself." See which of these teachings enliven you, work for you. We might say, "Take what you need and leave the rest." So, it's Batchelor's contention that these four propositions have been hardened into a fact to be believed. They've been transformed into—and this is the way they're usually expressed—life is suffering, the first Noble Truth. The second Noble Truth, the cause of such suffering is desire or craving. The third Noble Truth, but there's an end to suffering, and the fourth Noble Truth, that this end of suffering can be found in the Noble Eightfold Path, which is right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. I'm sure other people have lectured on the Noble Eightfold Path.

Now, I'm not sure why, but Batchelor prefers the term "anguish" to suffering. I'm not sure if that's a Britishism or what, but he uses the term "anguish" rather than the more common term "suffering." Batchelor states that the Buddha suggested that we *understand* anguish. When I came to Zen Center, I was suffering. When I heard, "Oh, life is suffering," I thought, great. I'm on board with that. Yeah, it's suffering, all right.

But Batchelor is saying that the Buddha suggested we *understand* suffering, and certainly, we understand suffering the best as we plumb the depths of our own suffering, both our self-created suffering and the suffering in the world around us that gives rise to our compassion for self and others. So, we should *understand* anguish, and then *let go* of its origins. This is the second Noble Truth that suffering is caused by craving. The Buddha says, "Let go of the origins of craving." The third is to *realize* its cessation; experience the end of suffering. And finally, to *cultivate* the path.

So, you might notice that to *understand*, to *let go*, to *realize*, to *cultivate*, these are very dynamic and active words, rather than saying, "You should believe that life is suffering, because you're a Buddhist." Batchelor says that in failing to make this distinction, that these are four Noble Truths to be acted upon rather than a list of things to believe in, that we miss the mark, that we really miss a golden thread, a kind of ennobling quality to these truths.

So, Batchelor is suggesting that dharma practice involves actively engaging with these truths and penetrating them through our own experience and by taking action. In my own case, I am a person in recovery. There was a very, very immediate and rich store of investigation around addiction for me. In Sanskrit, we say suffering is caused by craving, or *taṇhā*. *Taṇhā* literally means "thirst." I had to penetrate the nature of my thirst and recognize the self-created suffering of addiction. That was a very tangible way for me to work with these truths.

Batchelor says that the Buddha was not a mystic. He didn't feel that he laid claim to some esoteric truth that could be revealed only to the privileged or that you have to go to a cave in Tibet and sit for 30 years by yourself in order to experience these things. I like this phrase of Batchelor's: "Buddha had awakened from the sleep of existential confusion." I'm feeling a touch of existential nausea myself. That's another talk.

But I smile at myself because I did go practice at Tassajara at Zen Mountain Center for many years, and I remember thinking, I'll go to the monastery, I'll sit on the zafu, then I'll get enlightened, because I won't have any of these distractions. In my first sesshin at Tassajara, a seven-day sitting, I could not get the theme song from *The Flintstones* out of my head. I'm

not going to hum it for you so as to spare you of that experience! So, I guess the bumper sticker is true that no matter where you go, there you are.

So, the first two truths are that there is anguish, and its origin is in our constantly wishing for things to be otherwise—this kind of addictive craving. Even if we're not literally addicts, there's an addictive quality to that craving. Anguish and its origin describe our dilemma, according to Batchelor, and the third and fourth Noble Truths—cessation and the path—describe its resolution.

So, Buddha awoke to a set of interrelated truths rooted in the experience of here and now. He experienced them as ennobling. I think this is really important—that all of our human suffering is not separate from the path. It is the path, and it is ennobling. In other words, these are not propositions to be believed in but challenges to act upon. I'll say that again. These aren't propositions to be believed in, but challenges to act upon. That makes me feel a little excited. There's actually something I can do about this.

Buddha described himself as a healer rather than a savior. The Four Noble Truths can be seen as a diagnosis, a prognosis, and a treatment. Now, I want to share this with you, because I found it so entertaining. Batchelor compares this to the story of Alice in Wonderland, where Alice picks up the bottle labeled *Drink Me*. The bottle of anguish has the label *Understand Me*. It's an invitation to look deeply into the causes of our suffering: birth, sickness, old age, and death, and to penetrate the truth of impermanence through our own experience. We don't have to look very far to understand that our life is very fleeting.

Batchelor puts it this way: "If we ignore a powerful wave, it can crush us. But if we turn and face it and dive right into it, it is only water, this truth of impermanence." Woody Allen put it this way: "I'm not afraid of death. I just don't want to be there when it happens." He also said, "Mankind is standing at a great crossroads. One path leads to oblivion and death; the other, to utter annihilation. The choice is ours." Whatever else we think of Woody Allen, he got out some good one-liners.

So, the first Noble Truth is, *Understand Me*. Understand this anguish. And the second Noble Truth has the label *Let Go*. So when we practice with our afflictive emotions, we come to see, as we see when we sit silently like we did together today, that they are impermanent, transient, and conditional. The first truth isn't separate from the second truth, because in understanding the nature of our suffering, we can more easily let go of it. If we really understand the nature of our suffering and how we cause it ourselves in many cases, it's much easier to let go of it.

Now, importantly, Batchelor reminds us that letting go of craving isn't rejecting it, but allowing it to be what it is: a temporary state of mind that will pass away. Those of us in recovery live by this very simple truth, one day at a time, which is totally congruent with Buddhism. We live one day at a time. We don't swear off alcohol forever. We live one day at a time. Just today, I'm not going to drink.

So, if craving arises for me, I know that I don't have to act on it. I don't have to suffer over it, and I don't need to capitulate

to it. Letting go of craving isn't rejecting it, but we allow it to suffuse our body. We notice it. Whether we're craving the approval of other people, whether we're craving material things, whether we're craving that we'd love to have had a different childhood, you know, these kind of cravings that we have. We don't just cut them off and say, "Well, I'm a Buddhist now, so I'm not going to feel that." No, we allow them to suffuse our mind and body.

This is a quote from Batchelor: "This sudden gap in the rush of self-centered compulsion and fear allows us to see with unambiguous immediacy and clarity the transient, unreliable, and contingent nature of reality. In revealing life in all its vulnerability, it becomes the doorway of compassion. In the cessation of craving, we recognize that conditions arise and pass away moment by moment. This emptiness, this infinitely creative dimension of life, is the cessation of craving." Batchelor says that it whispers its own label, *Realize Me*. Realize that craving comes and goes and passes away.

We do have the capacity to realize this clearing in the still center of our life. We've all experienced this moment of grace, you might call it, but we tend to glimpse it and then it fades away. This is why practice is so important. Without practice in cultivation, our glimpse of the truth, while precious, is very fleeting. We can't grasp it. And we're back to the cycle of craving and resentment and unsatisfactoriness again, back into the treadmill of fear and denial.

So, it's only by opening the jar of practice, the bottle labeled *Cultivate Me*, that we integrate these truths into our lives and are able to act with courage and integrity. We cultivate our practice. Of course, this path to be cultivated is outlined in the Noble Eightfold Path, where Buddha offers us an ethical way of life. Clearly, if we're distracted by our misdeeds and our failings and our resentments and our fears, it's very hard to be fully present for this moment.

You are so fortunate to have found each other to practice together. There's a saying in the Lotus Sutra, "Only a Buddha together with a Buddha can recognize the ultimate truth." It's only in practice with other people that we can really come to life, so I know you treasure this sangha, as I treasure coming to be with you.

So, I really appreciate this interpretation of the Four Noble Truths, rather than seeing them as a dusty set of beliefs to adhere to so we can call ourselves Buddhists; instead they are a dynamic reality that we can practice actively in our daily lives. Awakening is no longer being seen as something distant to attain. It's not a thing but a process, and this process is the path itself. Understanding our suffering matures into letting go of it, and letting go culminates in realization of the transient nature of suffering. Realization leads to cultivation of the path.

The Buddha said, "I teach about suffering and an end to suffering." The Noble Eightfold Path and the Buddhist precepts are the antidotes to suffering, because when we live according to these precepts, we suffer less, and the people around us suffer less. So, we're so fortunate that we have these teachings and that we can align ourselves with the wisdom not only of those who have gone before us, but those who are all around us, all around us here today. We share in this collective intention to wake up together. So, we take up a course of action.

I find this so consoling and comforting, that this very life, each of us, our individual life, in communion with others, is our path. There's nothing separate from that.

Batchelor says that some scholars and practitioners will say, “You can’t call yourself a Buddhist unless you believe in reincarnation.” He points out that the Buddha really believed in reincarnation in the context of the culture in which he grew up. In fact, he would talk about many of his previous lifetimes as many different animals. You can read about those in the *Jātaka Tales*. The idea that life continues somehow after death is central in many religions. Evangelical Christians seem to believe that unless you think you’re going to burn in hell for sinning that people won’t stay in line. They have to believe.

Recently, my children were talking about reincarnation and what happens after you die. We had a big discussion about it. I was so surprised how many of these little eight year old kids were talking about heaven and hell. I’m quite sure their parents don’t believe in heaven and hell. I don’t know where they pick this up, although they do think there’s a special place in hell for a certain person with orange hair. My third graders are quite astute.

Of course, the idea of reincarnation is tied up with the notion of karma and that ethical behavior in this life will be rewarded somehow in future lifetimes. But Batchelor has a refreshing approach to some of these ideas and offers the alternative of cultivating a healthy agnosticism. If ideas arise in the teachings that you can practice with that are real to you, that are wholesome and affirming of life and make you feel healthy and well and make others feel healthy and well, then you can have a dynamic relationship with these teachings. Otherwise, in terms of reincarnation, for example, it’s okay to firmly say that we just don’t know. I’ve told you before about the story of two of my students who were walking down the hallway behind me, and Thalia said to Tessa, “Would you rather be buried or cremated?” Tessa said, “I don’t know. Surprise me.” I think we could say the same about what happens after we die. I don’t know, surprise me.

Recently, I was out at Point Reyes and this young woman came up to me and she said, “Laura, I don’t know if you remember me, but my name is Anna Wiley. I was one of your third grade students.” I said, “Anna, not only do I remember you, I remember when you raised your hand and said, ‘Laura, what happens after you die? I forget.’” I love how they think I know the answer to all these questions, including whether or not Reno is the biggest little city in the world.

So, here’s what Batchelor says about this kind of agnosticism: “Where does this leave us? It may seem that there are two options. You could believe in rebirth or not, but there is a third alternative, to acknowledge in all honesty, I do not know. We neither have to adopt the literal version of rebirth presented by religious tradition nor fall into the extreme of regarding death as annihilation. Regardless of what we believe, our actions will reverberate beyond our deaths. Irrespective of our personal survival, the legacy of our thoughts, words, and deeds will continue through the impressions we leave behind in the lives

of those we have influenced or touched in any way.” I think that’s really beautiful.

Suzuki Roshi, who founded the San Francisco Zen Center, died shortly before I came to Zen Center, so I never got to meet him. But his students have told me that he would engage in conversations about reincarnation. At my father’s funeral, Linda Cutts officiated, and she used a metaphor that Suzuki Roshi preferred. When he was standing at the foot of Vernal Falls in Yosemite, he said that he looked up and saw the drops of water coming down, and he said—and Linda repeated this at my father’s funeral—“Our life is like that. At the top of the falls, the water breaks apart into individual drops. At the bottom, they rejoin the unity of water. Our life springs forth from a mystery. We live our fleeting lives, and then return to the mystery.”

We say in the memorial service in Buddhism that the person has entered the great mystery. Batchelor shares in this book a time-honored meditation on death, which is, “Since death alone is certain and the time of death uncertain, what should I do?” In meditating on this phrase, we confront that the life right before us is here for us to live.

Lao Tzu said, “Look well to this day, for this is life, the very life of life.” In other words, live one day at a time, you know? This reminds me of this teaching of Carlos Castaneda and his tales of the Yaqui shaman—that your death is always sitting on your shoulder, and you should remind yourself to live fully right now. So, rather than taking on the teachings and having them harden into beliefs, I think we can keep alive his intention to live these principles with an open heart and mind.

As the Buddha said, “You must be a lamp unto yourself.” Dōgen Zenji, the Japanese monk that brought Zen from Chan Buddhism—Zen from China to Japan—said, “In the *Fukan-zazengi*,” which are his instructions on meditation, “take the backwards step that turns the light and shines it inward.” Isn’t that beautiful? He was a poet, too. “Take the backwards step that turns the light and shines it inward.” I find this so consoling and comforting, that this very life, each of us, our individual life, in communion with others, is our path. There’s nothing separate from that.

All the silly, even the self-destructive things we’ve done have been part of that path, in that they’ve led us towards awakening. So each of us must find our own way, and luckily, we have the great fortune to be able to do this within a sangha of those who are engaged in this ongoing experiment. Batchelor also talks about various aspects of Buddhism and the way in which they’ve been interpreted and misinterpreted in the West.

For one thing, the term “Buddhism”—I didn’t know this until I read his book—was coined in the West in the 1800’s. A more appropriate word for what we’re engaged in, and this is Batchelor’s translation of this practice, is dharma practice,

where we actively practice with the teachings, rather than freezing them into something to believe in, into an “ism,” in other words. So, that’s Batchelor on Buddhism. I think his is a very refreshing approach to lightening up a little bit and not being too fundamentalist or doctrinaire about these things.

Now, can you indulge me a little bit and allow me to share a poem with you? I think I shared this with you before, but I really love this poem about reincarnation:

*“What does reincarnation mean?”  
A cowpoke ast his friend.  
His pal replied, “It happens when  
Yer life has reached its end.  
They comb yer hair, and warsh yer neck,  
And clean yer fingernails,  
And lay you in a padded box  
Away from life’s travails.”*

*“The box and you goes in a hole,  
That’s been dug into the ground.  
Reincarnation starts in when  
Yore planted ‘neath a mound.  
Them clods melt down, just like yer box,  
And you who is inside.  
And then yore just beginnin’ on  
Yer transformation ride.”*

*“In a while, the grass’ll grow  
Upon yer rendered mound.  
Till some day on yer moldered grave  
A lonely flower is found.  
And say a hoss should wander by,  
And graze upon this flower,  
That once wuz you, but now’s become  
Yer vegetative bower.”*

*“The posy that the hoss done ate  
Up, with his other feed,  
Makes bone, and fat, and muscle  
Essential to the steed.  
But some is left that he can’t use,  
And so it passes through,  
And finally lays upon the ground.  
This thing, that once wuz you.”*

*“Then say, by chance, I wanders by,  
And sees this on the ground.  
And I ponders, and I wonders at,  
This object that I found.  
I thinks of reincarnation,  
Of life, and death, and such.  
I come away concludin’ ... ‘Slim,  
You ain’t changed, all that much.’”*

Forgive me for that self-indulgence. Now, I can’t take credit for that poem. It’s from the Elko Cowboy Poetry Festival. It’s by Waddie Mitchell and is called *Reincarnation*, and is by far the best poem out of the Cowboy Poetry Festival.

In closing, let’s chant the *Metta Sutta* together. This is a teaching that Zen Center adopted rather late in my practice, and I

really love it, because it so reflects Batchelor’s comment that if it’s wholesome, if it furthers your wellbeing and those of the people around you, then embrace it. For me, this is so practical and something that we could chant every day. I chant it in front of my altar in the morning. It includes the wonderful phrases “May all beings be happy. May they be joyous and live in safety.” That is the core of the *Metta Sutta*. If we find ourselves trapped in craving, resentment, hopelessness or despair, these are wonderful phrases to call to mind to remind us that we can hold in our hearts this wish for all beings. So, I’ll begin by just chanting the name of the *sutta*, and then please join with me. You probably know this, but for those of you who might be new to chanting, we find a similar note and then chant together on that note.

*Metta Sutta*

*This is what should be accomplished by the one who is wise,  
Who seeks the good, and has obtained peace.*

*Let one be strenuous, upright, and sincere,  
Without pride, easily contented, and joyous.  
Let one not be submerged by the things of the world.  
Let one not take upon oneself the burden of riches.  
Let one’s senses be controlled.  
Let one be wise but not puffed up and  
Let one not desire great possessions even for one’s family.  
Let one do nothing that is mean or that the wise would re-  
prove.*

*May all beings be happy.  
May they be joyous and live in safety,  
All living beings, whether weak or strong,  
In high or middle or low realms of existence.  
Small or great, visible or invisible,  
Near or far, born or to be born,  
May all beings be happy.*

*Let no one deceive another nor despise any being in any state.  
Let none by anger or hatred wish harm to another.  
Even as a mother at the risk of her life  
Watches over and protects her only child,  
So with a boundless mind should one cherish all living things.  
Suffusing love over the entire world,  
Above, below, and all around, without limit,  
So let one cultivate an infinite good will toward the whole  
world.*

*Standing or walking, sitting or lying down,  
During all one’s waking hours,  
Let one practice the way with gratitude.*

*Not holding to fixed views,  
Endowed with insight,  
Freed from sense appetites,  
One who achieves the way  
Will be freed from the duality of birth and death.*

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### **10:30 am to 12 noon**

Every Sunday at 10:30am we meditate together for 30 minutes, followed by a talk or discussion till 12pm. Everyone is then welcome to stay and socialize over refreshments till approximately 12:30pm, after which those who are interested usually go somewhere local for lunch. Our sittings are held at the San Francisco Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett Street (look for the red door near 21st St between Mission and Valencia Streets).

**MUNI:** 14 Mission or 49 Van Ness-Mission, alight at 21st St, walk 1/2 block

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# Sunday Speakers

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## **June 3 Steven Tierney**

Steven Tierney is Professor of Community Mental Health and Chair of the Masters in Counseling Psychology Core Curriculum at CIIS. He is a licensed psychotherapist in California and a nationally certified counselor. An ordained Buddhist priest, he is the co-founder and chief education officer of the San Francisco Mindfulness Foundation. Dr. Tierney lectures and leads workshops and retreat nationally and has taught at a number of universities. Steven's areas of interest include Buddhist psychology and mindfulness-based therapies for addiction, recovery and resiliency services.

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## **June 10 Open Discussion**

## **June 17 Alistair Shanks**

Alistair Shanks has been a dedicated practitioner and teacher of the Taoist Internal Martial Arts for over 20 years. Since 2008, he has been an adjunct faculty member at the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine/CIIS where he teaches Tai Chi. Alistair has been a volunteer with Zen Hospice Project and was hired to serve as the Volunteer Program Manager in 2016. His other volunteer work includes working as a Buddhist chaplain at San Francisco General Hospital and leading meditation sessions for inmates in the San Francisco County Jail. In his spare time he plays with San Francisco's legendary hardcore polka band Polkacide.

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## **June 24 David Lewis**

David Lewis has been following the dharma path for 45 years and has a degree in comparative religious studies. He teaches Insight Meditation and enjoys sharing the dharma at several sanghas around the Bay Area. He is a proud long time member of GBF. His talk will be Foundations of Mindfulness, Part One.

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## **July 1 Open Discussion**

## **July 8 Rev. Keiryu Liên Shutt**

Rev. Keiryu Liên Shutt is a Dharma Heir of Zenkei Blanche Hartman in the tradition of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. Born into a Buddhist family in Vietnam, she began her meditation practice in the Insight tradition of Spirit Rock. She was a founding member of the Buddhists of Color in 1998. Her Soto Zen training began at Tassajara monastery where she lived from 2002-2005; after which, she practiced monastically in Japan and Vietnam. Drawing from her monastic experiences, she endeavors to share ways in which the deep settledness of traditional practices can be brought into everyday life. Liên's strength as a teacher is in making Zen practice accessible to all.

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## **July 15 Eve Decker**

Eve Decker began practicing Vipassana meditation in 1991. She has been teaching dharma since 2006. She has released two CDs of original, dharma based music. She leads groups on 'Metta-for-Self' and a monthly 'Sit-and-Sing-Sangha' in her hometown of Berkeley CA. She is a graduate of the Path of Engagement and Community Dharma Leader training programs at Spirit Rock Center in California. For more on Eve see her website at [www.evedecker.com](http://www.evedecker.com).

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## **July 22 David Lewis**

David Lewis has been following the dharma path for 45 years and has a degree in comparative religious studies. He teaches Insight Meditation and enjoys sharing the dharma at several sanghas around the Bay Area. He is a proud long time member of GBF. His talk will be Foundations of Mindfulness, Part Two.

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## **July 29 Amanda Ream**

Amanda Ream facilitates the QSangha for the queer community at SF Against the Stream, Oakland Dharma Punx and the Social Justice Sangha at the East Bay Meditation Center in Oakland. She also practices with Generative Somatics and is a union organizer with domestic workers. She lives in Oakland.

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## **August 5 Open Discussion**

## **August 12 Daigan Gaither**

Rev. Daigan Gaither began Buddhist practice in 1995 in the Vipassana tradition and then began to study Zen in 2003 with Ryushin Paul Haller Roshi. He received Lay Ordination in 2006, when he was given the name Daigan or "Great Vow." He received Priest Ordination in July 2011. His work, practice, and free time include many hours devoted to community service in a variety of ways, including his work as one of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence and as a volunteer at Zen Hospice Project. He has spoken nationwide on a variety of issues and has sat on a number of boards and committees that serve community and social justice.

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## **August 19 Nils Heymann**

A native of El Salvador, Nils started meditating at the age of 16. He studied major religions at Lancaster University in England and researched gurus in Pune, India. From Hindu and Benedictine monasteries, he went to Thailand to be ordained in Ajahn Chah's Forest tradition. A monk for seven years, he lived in monasteries in England, New Zealand and Italy. After monastic life, he lived in Minnesota and founded Common Ground's Gay Men's Community Group. He has given talks in a variety of venues including The East Bay Meditation Center in Oakland. The first discourse of the Buddha is the framework by which he lives his life. Nils is a member of the Alphabet Brothers of Color Deep Refuge Group. His teachers continue to be Ajahn Viradhammo and Ajahn Sumedho. He lives in Oakland, CA.

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## **August 26 Devin Berry**

Devin Berry has practiced meditation since 1999, and has undertaken many longer-term retreats. He practices primarily within the Theravada lineages as taught by Mahasi Sayadaw, Sayadaw U Pandita, Anagarika Munindra, Sayadaw U Tejaniya, and Dipa Ma. Devin teaches nationally as well as guest teaches at East Bay Meditation Center in Oakland and SF Against the Stream. He is a core leader of the SF POC Insight Meditation group. He has completed Spirit Rock's Dedicated Practitioners Program and is currently a participant in the 2017-2021 IMS Teacher Training Program. His teachers include Lyn Fine, Larry Yang, Joseph Goldstein, Carol Wilson, and Andrea Fella. Devin can be described as an engaging, humorous storyteller who uses poignant anecdotes to convey powerful truths and a breadth of life experience.

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by the power and truth of this practice, may all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness, may all be free from sorrow and the causes of sorrow, may all never be separated from the sacred happiness which is without sorrow, and may all live in equanimity, without too much attachment or too much aversion, believing in the equality of all that lives.

—GBF dedication of merit